

Before the Federal Communications Commission Washington, D. C. 20554

APR - 4 2000
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMUNICATIONS
OFFICE OF THE SECRET

		OCCRETARY
In the Matter of)	
Inquiry Concerning Deployment of)	
Advanced Telecommunications Capability)	
To All Americans in a Reasonable and)	CC Docket No. 98-146
Timely Fashion, and Possible Steps to)	
Accelerate Such Deployment Pursuant)	
To Section 706 of the Telecommunications)	
Act of 1996)	

REPLY COMMENTS OF SBC COMMUNICATIONS INC.

SBC Communications Inc. (SBC) submits this reply to the comments filed on the Commission's *Notice of Inquiry (NOI)* in this proceeding. Many of the comments take similar positions and advocate regulatory policies consistent with the views which SBC has previously expressed in this case.

I. Definition of Advanced Services Capability

Although some of the commenters support the Commission's existing definition of "advanced telecommunications capability," most agree with SBC that the current definition is too limiting in that it will not capture the most commonly used advanced

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¹ Defined as 200 kbps in both directions. US West, p.2; Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (PASTCO), p.3: MCI Worldcom, p.3.

service applications.² At least in terms of today's technology, 200 kbps is frequently used in the downstream direction, while slower speeds (e.g., 33.6 kbps as provided by 56 kbps modems) are often used in the upstream direction in providing broadband services.³ There should be no requirement of 200 Kbps as a minimum speed and no requirement that the same minimum speed be used in both directions.⁴

The Commission should not define advanced services to exclude either asymmetrical or wireless, satellite, and cable modem technologies. As a number of commenters observe, there are a number of different ways to provide advanced services,⁵ and the Commission should not define advanced services to favor or exclude particular services or technologies.

II. Advanced Services Availability

It is clear from the comments that, although in its early stages, the deployment of advanced services is set to occur at a rapid pace and that it is likely that advanced services will become quickly available (over the next three to five years) to all Americans without regard to their specific geographic location (urban v. rural, suburb v. inner city) or to the particular technology or provider used. Cable systems currently lead such deployment and, according to the National Cable Television Association (NCTA), by the end of 2003, "93% of all cable homes will be passed by activated two-way plant," compared to 68% at the end of 1999.6

² Bell Atlantic, p. 2; Commercial Internet Exchange Association (CIX), p.3-4; AT&T, p.4; Metricom, p.4-6

³ AT&T, p.4

⁴ Id., GTE, pp. 6-8;

⁵ CIX, pp. 3-4;GTE, p.6; AT&T, pp.7-8;

⁶ NCTA, p. 8

Hughes Network Systems (HNS), a current and future provider of satellite-based broadband services, states that its service "is and will be available to all Americans," and that its service will narrow the "Digital Divide" for rural and consumer broadband users. Similarly, Sprint alleges that its fixed wireless service represents "the single most effective means of providing broadband service to rural and under-served Americans and a critical third facilities-based competitor to digital subscriber line (DSL) and cable modem offerings."

The significance of such deployment efforts is that they are taking place independent of the wireline deployment of advanced telecommunications capabilities and represent alternative facilities-based deployment that can and will be used to meet American consumers' advanced service needs. The comments also show that wireline deployment is proceeding through the deployment of Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) technology with some praising and others criticizing SBC's aggressive deployment

⁷ HNS, pp. 2-3. The Commission can assist such deployment by identifying and allocating a sufficient amount of satellite-based spectrum.

⁸ Sprint, pp. 1-2; See also Comments of the Wireless Communications Association at p. 3: "[F]ixed wireless technology utilizing the MDS and ITFS spectrum at 2150-2162 MHz and 2500-2690 MHz is particularly well-suited for extending broadband services to the residential, rural or otherwise underserved areas that are the focus of the NOI." AT&T also recognizes the existence of these alternatives characterizing satellite services as "powerful competitors," as "ubiquitous," and as "economical, with systems costs of only a few hundred dollars per customer." It notes that fixed wireless broadband is "fast, easy to deploy and relatively cheap." AT&T also points to the existence of other alternatives, such as public utility-provided services and a national broadcast network that "will use a dedicated portion of the digital spectrum assigned to local TV stations to deliver a wide array of high-speed, over-the-air broadband digital content and services directly to consumers." pp.13-18.

As such, the alternatives must be considered in the Commission's evaluation of the section 252(d) "necessary and impair" standard. *AT&T Corp. v. Iowa Utilities Board* 25 U.S. 366, 389,119 3.c4. 721, 142 L. Ed. 834 (1999) ["The Commission cannot, consistent with the statute, blind itself to the availability of elements outside the incumbent's network."]

efforts. ¹⁰ But the focus in this area needs to be on more than just the wireline deployment of advanced telecommunications capabilities and services.

III. Deployment On A Reasonable And Timely Basis

The commenters are split on whether advanced telecommunications capability has been deployed on a "reasonable and timely" basis to all Americans. Some commenters believe it has,¹¹ others believe it has not.¹² SBC believes that the determination cannot be made at this time, but should be made at a later date after the market has had more time to develop.

IV. Actions To Accelerate Deployment

The commenters are also split on the actions the Commission should take to accelerate deployment. Most of the commenters agree with SBC that a "hands-off" approach to the regulation of advanced services will do the most to stimulate their growth. Others urge the Commission to take the opposite approach and to regulate the incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs) investment in and provision of these

¹⁰ NCTA, pp. 19-23 & Appendix A, pp. 8-14 ["One of the most progressive Bell Companies is Southwestern Bell Communications."]; Dave Burstein; cf. AT&T, pp.40-42.

¹¹ GTE, p.5; HNS, pp. 2-3; Bell Atlantic, p.8

¹² US West, p.3; Metricom, pp.6-7; MCI Worldcom, p.3-4

¹³ Bell Atlantic, pp. 2 & 7;BellSouth, pp.4-8; GTE, p.25; US West, pp.5-7; USTA, pp.1-8; Citizens Utilities, pp. 9-10; Erik Uitto; Cox Communications, pp.16-18; MediaOne, pp. 3-4; NCTA, pp.19-25; Wireless Communications, pp.22-26,38-39; Skybridge, pp.1-3,9-10; Alcatel, p.2; Consumer Electronics Association (CEA), pp.1-5; Nortel Networks, pp.6-9; United Telecom Council (UTC), p.1

services. ¹⁴ A third group asks the Commission to accelerate deployment through subsidies and universal service fund support. ¹⁵

SBC agrees with BellSouth and other commenters that deployment of wireline capabilities would be enhanced by a reduction in regulation and the elimination of the disparity which exists in the regulation of the ILECs versus the "no regulation" policy which has been applied to cable operators, among others. Current policies which inhibit wireline deployment of advanced services are: (1) continued application of the section 271 restriction on the Bell Operating Companies' interLATA provision of advanced services; (2) requirements that the ILECs allow access to their facilities at prices which are zero or below cost; (3) the lack of regulatory symmetry among providers; (4) the application of eligibility restrictions and spectrum caps; (5) the requirement that ILECs pay "reciprocal compensation" for delivery of traffic to the Internet; (6) ILEC unbundling requirements, when alternative facilities clearly exist; and (7) regulatory intrusion into ILEC network planning and design.

Not content with government deregulation of its own systems and services, AT&T seeks to increase government regulation of the ILECs and to impose additional obligations and requirements on them in regard to their provision of advanced services.¹⁶

¹⁵ National Exchange Carrier Association (NECA), pp.5-11; National Rural Telecom Association (NRTA), pp.2-3,9,11-12; National Telephone Cooperative Association (NTCA), p.8

AT&T, pp.39-44; Telecommunications Resellers Association (TRA), pp.7-10; CIX, pp.12-17; Jato Communications, pp. 2-3,6-11,12-14; MCI Worldcom, pp.6-12;

AT&T, pp.40-44; It is hypocritical for AT&T to suggest additional regulation of the ILECs when it has long opposed any "like" treatment (i.e., open access) being applied to its own cable systems, and when cable modem service and availability enjoy the dominant position in the advanced services market. For AT&T to complain about the ILECs not opening up their networks as a detriment to broadband deployment is disingenuous. Unlike the ILECs, AT&T has done nothing at this point to open up its

Moreover, much of what AT&T seeks (*e.g.*, UNE platform line sharing) simply reiterates the positions it has taken on issues which are being addressed in other proceedings.¹⁷ Even if AT&T had "clean hands" on this issue, it is neither necessary nor reasonable to address the ILEC issues it raises in this proceeding.

Jumping on the AT&T "bandwagon," others have been critical of SBC's "Project Pronto," and have accused SBC of attempting to dictate technology and of foreclosing consumer options by its network design. In truth, Project Pronto does neither. Project Pronto does not take away the options that competitors have today. What it does is significantly expand those options by increasing the reach of SBC's network, making it more DSL-capable and faster in speed. That Pronto increases the deployment of fiber in the network, far from being a nefarious plot, simply reflects the trend and technology choice of *all* telecommunications carriers over the past decade. On this issue, SBC agrees with USTA that "it is bad policy to involve the Commission, much less competitors, in making or approving ILEC decisions on the deployment of new technologies and the design of [new] networks." More than anything, that would discourage, rather than encourage, ILEC investment in advanced service technologies and

cable lines in order to allow broadband competition to flourish over another landline path into people's homes. AT&T's whole approach has been to protect its cable market, while attempting to gain market share in the ILECs' market by having them subjected to more and more obligations and requirements. AT&T's position is also stark in contrast to the position of other cable operators, which is that the Commission's 'hands-off" policy is "exactly correct." Cox, p.11; Media One, pp.5-6; [Cable modem service growth demonstrates that the congressional objective of making a full range of broadband services available to consumers on a "reasonable and timely" basis can and will be achieved without regulatory intervention].

¹⁸ United States Telecom Association (USTA), pp. 6-7

¹⁷ AT&T Petition for Expedited Clarification, CC Docket No. 98-147 (Line Sharing); AT&T Petition for Reconsideration, CC Docket No. 96-98 (UNE Remand)

networks for it would be akin to giving the CLECs a say in those decisions and would reduce the ILECs' incentive to make those investments.

Just as contrary to the purpose of section 706 is the suggestion of CIX that ILECs should not be allowed to bundle services or offer discounts on bundled packages of enhanced and advanced services. Not only are such packages and discounts pro consumer, they are a necessary incentive in many instances to overcome consumer reluctance to subscribe to advanced services and, in that way also, actually promote the growth and deployment of advanced services. Here, again, a "hands-off" approach is advisable and the Commission should not interfere with the ILECs' right to decide how best to design their retail products for consumers, particularly when the Commission does not do so in the case of other advanced service providers.

Finally, SBC disagrees with the proposals of NECA, NRTA, and NTCA on the need for advanced service subsidies and universal service fund support to stimulate the deployment of advanced services. Given the stated willingness, based on this record, of a number of providers to serve "all areas" and "all Americans," the NECA, NRTA, and NTCA proposals are premature and may not even be necessary. In this area also, the Commission should resist the temptation to over-regulate and should allow the market to determine whether or not such subsidies will be needed.

V. Conclusion

The Commission should modify its definition of advanced telecommunications capability so that it will include, not exclude, existing broadband services and technologies. The Commission should not limit its focus to the deployment of wireline

¹⁹ NECA pp. 5-11; NRTA pp. 2-3,11-12; NTCA pp. 8-9

telecommunications services and capabilities in evaluating whether advanced service capabilities are being made available "to all Americans." The Commission should allow the market more time to develop before determining whether or not advanced services and capabilities are being deployed on a "reasonable and timely" basis.

The Commission should adopt a "hands-off" approach to the regulation of advanced services, and should adopt measures to eliminate the disparate and unequal regulation of different providers of advanced services. The Commission should reject attempts to impose additional obligations and unequal regulatory burdens on the ILECs in this proceeding.

The Commission should also reject the proposals to make advanced services subject to subsidies and universal service fund support. Those proposals are premature and may ultimately prove unnecessary.

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